

Proposal #: 20SER001-017

Project Title: An Economic Profiling of North Carolina Shellfish Growers and Their Business Challenges, and an Exploration of Innovative Regulatory Strategies to Promote Growth

Applicant: NC Department of Environmental Quality

Priority Addressed Priority #1 – Promotion, Development and Marketing

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Abstract: North Carolina is fostering a burgeoning shellfish mariculture industry, driven primarily by the production of oysters. In response to the organic interest in these products, state lawmakers have expressed clear interest in boosting shellfish mariculture in the state, and becoming a premier destination for farmed shellfish products within the country. Key examples of this are a goal to reach \$33 million in shellfish mariculture production annually by 2030, as well as a new statute that promotes the creation of shellfish enterprise areas (SEAs), a tool already employed in other states, to boost production. Given this landscape, there is a clear need for research to ensure the success of North Carolina's shellfish mariculture future.

This project aims to use primary research to better understand the socioeconomic conditions of North Carolina's shellfish mariculture participants through survey research. Additionally, the project will also leverage key stakeholders from states with mariculture industries and innovative regulations via a working group format to discuss shellfish mariculture, how to foster it, and how to best design SEA regulations. In all, this project maximizes our understanding of the business behind shellfish mariculture in North Carolina, in order to maximize our ability to meet the state's long term vision.

Summary of potential commercial benefits to the fishing community of the research results:

This study allows for benefits to be felt by both private and public stakeholders in the shellfish mariculture industry. By conducting the first socioeconomic profiling of shellfish mariculture operators, we will begin to understand the largest financial, operational, and regulatory barriers to success in North Carolina. This will be complimented by targeted conversations with industry stakeholders to understand the challenges of mariculture regulation and how to successfully innovate. We hope our research leads to higher efficiency and increased profits, while state regulators will benefit from reduced implementation costs and more impactful mariculture, both inside and out of potential enterprise areas.
